



Southcentral Region
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Sport Fish

Northern Cook Inlet
Recreational Fishing Series

Matanuska - Susitna Valley & West Cook Inlet King Salmon

King salmon fishing in the Northern Cook Inlet area

Kings are the largest of the Pacific salmon, and the first salmon to arrive each summer. Every year, thousands of anglers visit the Northern Cook Inlet area hoping to take home a 25-, 30-, maybe even 50-pound chinook salmon.

Northern Cook Inlet king salmon anglers have three major recreational fishing opportunities: 1) one of the hundreds of drainages of the Susitna River, or 2) the Little Susitna River, or 3) one of the West Cook Inlet streams.

The sprawling Susitna River drainage is made up of major glacial tributaries, including the Yentna, Skwentna, Chulitna, and Talkeetna rivers. These rivers each have dozens of clear water streams flowing into them.

The streams that empty into the east side of the Susitna River begin high in the Talkeetna mountains. These streams are generally accessible by car from the Parks Highway (Alaska Highway 3).

The streams that flow into the west side of the Susitna begin in the Alaska Range. These streams more remote, requiring boat or small plane access.

The Susitna River king salmon run is the fourth largest in the state, behind the Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Nushagak rivers. Between 100,000-200,000 king salmon return every year to the Susitna River drainage ... about twice the number bound for the Kenai River!

For opening dates, daily limits, fishing regulations, and special tackle restrictions, consult the Southcentral Alaska regulation booklet.

*Alexander
Creek,
early
June.*

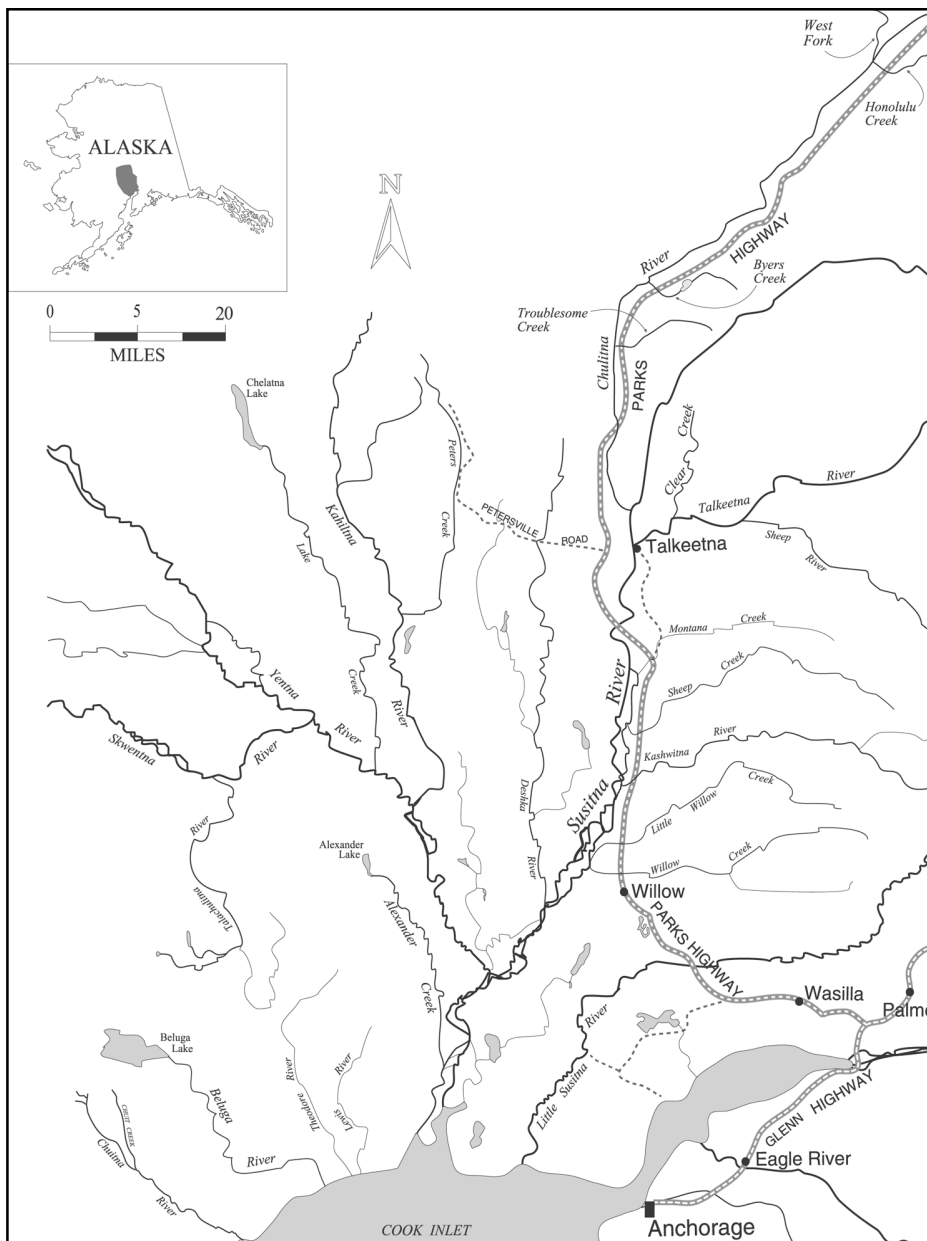


The top seven king salmon streams in Northern Cook Inlet, in number of kings harvested are

1. Talkeetna River
2. Deshka River
3. Willow Creek
4. Montana Creek
5. Lake Creek (Yentna drainage)
6. Little Susitna River
7. Alexander Creek

Emergency Orders

The Department of Fish and Game may open, close, or otherwise modify any fishery at any time during times of biological need. In the event of an emergency the public is notified through news media, on the recorded hotline (907) 267-2510, as well as through the ADF&G web site.



Do your part to help salmon and trout

River banks are crucial to the health of Alaska fish.

Vegetation slows runoff and erosion, provides a hiding place for juvenile fish, slows the current so the young fish are not washed out, and cools the stream. Here are some general suggested guidelines that have been proven to help preserve the banks and juvenile fish habitat:

- ☐ Do not cut brush or trees within 10 feet of waterline.
- ☐ Use established trails to reach the river, and established entry and exit points into the water.
- ☐ Wear boots and stand in the river, away from fragile vegetation.
- ☐ Pack out what you pack in, including discarded fishing line and tackle.

The Northern Cook Inlet area. The maps in this publication are not to scale, and are for informational purposes only. The United States Geological Survey is an excellent source for to-scale topographical maps: www.mapping.usgs.gov.

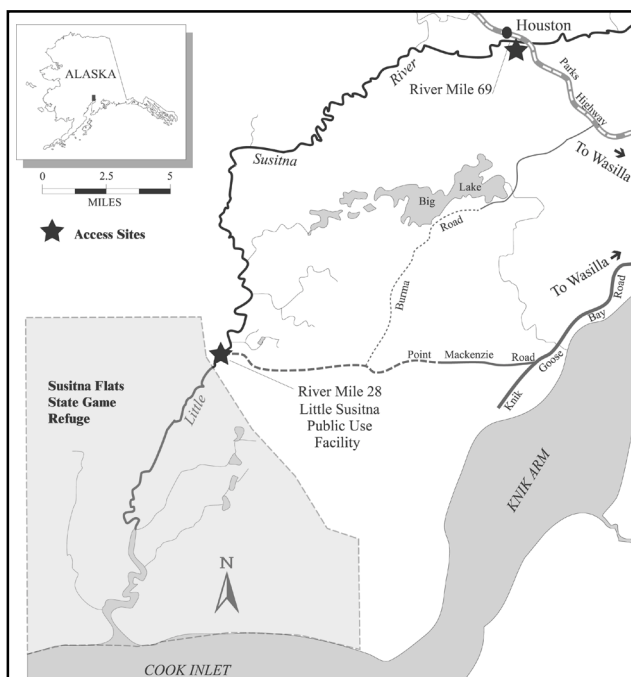


These opportunities funded in part by Federal Aid in Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration.

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The Little Susitna River

Fishing for kings on the Little Susitna River (Knik area)

The Little Susitna River in the Knik area is the first king salmon fishing opportunity as you drive north of Anchorage. The “Little Su,” as locals call it, is the only stream in the Knik area open to king salmon fishing. After the Little Su, the next king salmon fishing opportunity is Willow Creek, covered under the next section.

Access to the Little Su

There are three primary ways to access the Little Susitna.

Experienced boaters can gain access to the intertidal reaches of the Little Susitna by launching from the Port of Anchorage and crossing Cook Inlet.

CAUTION! Northern Cook Inlet has 30-foot tides and strong winds ... not a good place to begin a boating career! If, however, you are experienced, and have a properly-equipped 20-foot or better boat, or a saltwater-capable inflatable, crossing the inlet is an efficient way to reach the mouth of the Little Susitna River.

Just remember to enter and exit the river’s mouth during the hours of high tide. When reading the tide book make certain that you adjust for the difference in time that high tide arrives at Anchorage and then at the mouth

of the Little Su. If the river is running high, power boats can sometimes travel from the mouth up to the Parks Highway bridge. During low water, however, most power boats travel up only as far as river mile 28.

If you don’t have a boat, or don’t want to risk the strong tides of Cook Inlet, drive to the Little Susitna River Public Use Facility (LSPUF) boat launch and campground. In Wasilla, turn west on the Knik-Goose Bay Road and follow the signs to the LSPUF (or follow the signs on Burma Road from Big Lake).

The Parks Highway bridge at Mile 58, near the community of Houston, offers foot, boat, canoe, or raft access. Many anglers launch rafts or canoes at the bridge, then take out at the LSPUF, about a two- or three-day trip.

The Little Su wanders through part of the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge, over 300,000 acres of prime waterfowl, moose, coyote, wolf, and bear habitat. Access to the refuge is managed by ADF&G for the protection of fish and wildlife, their habitats, and public use of the area. Uses of state refuge lands are controlled to prevent habitat changes which would be harmful to the wildlife or habitat.

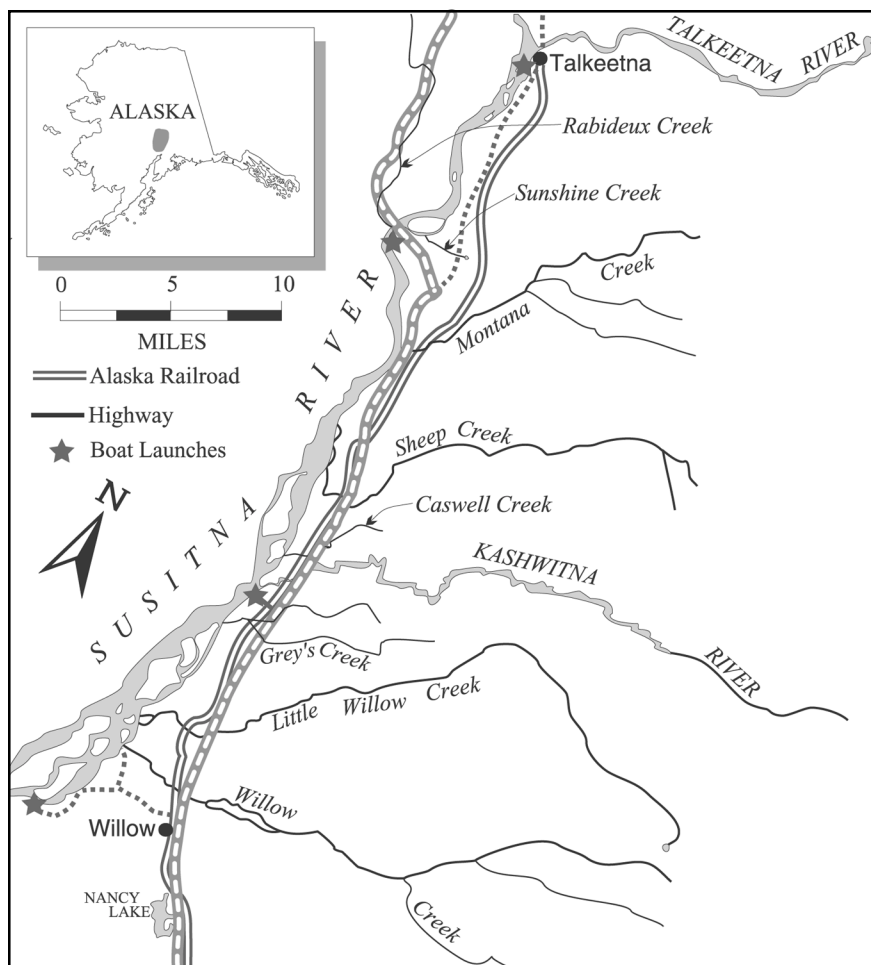
Fishing for kings on the Little Susitna River

The Little Su is open to fishing for king salmon from its mouth upstream to the Parks Highway bridge, about 70 river miles. About 2,200 chinook are harvested annually. Average size is 22 pounds.

King salmon arrive in the lower portion of the Little Susitna River in late May. They peak in the lower river about the second week in June, and remain available until the season closure. The peak of the king salmon run near the Parks Highway bridge is around June 20.

Eastside Susitna River king salmon fishing

The eastside Susitna River waters are the next king salmon fishing opportunity as you head north from the Knik area. Eastside Susitna waters include Willow Creek and everything north of it on the eastern side of the Susitna River - Little Willow Creek, Kashwitna River, Caswell Creek, Sheep Creek, Goose Creek, Montana Creek, Sunshine Creek, Birch Creek, Rabideux Creek, the Talkeetna River, Fish and Clear creeks, and the Chulitna River drainage.



Eastside Susitna River streams.

Willow Creek is the only enhanced chinook salmon fishery in this area. All the others are targeting wild stock.

How to get there: Access to east side streams

If you don't have a boat, the east side Susitna waters crossed by the Parks Highway or the Talkeetna Spur Road will offer the best opportunity for shore-based angling.

If you're in good hiking condition, the Alaska Railroad "whistle stop" service provides relatively inexpensive access to the Susitna River king fisheries north of the community of Talkeetna. Call 1-800-208-0200 or go on line to www.thealaskarailroad.com.

If you have a boat or a raft, you have your choice of 4 access sites along the Parks Highway — Deshka Landing, Susitna Landing at the mouth of the Kashwitna River, the Mile 104 Parks Hwy. bridge crossing the Susitna River, and Talkeetna Landing in the village of Talkeetna. Except at the Parks Hwy. bridge, fees are charged to launch from these facilities.

If you operate a jet boat or have a large boat, the Susitna Landing, Deshka Landing, or the Talkeetna Landing are your best bets, not only because of the excellent launching facilities available for larger boats, but also because you can access the main channel of the Susitna River directly from these sites.

Deshka Landing is located off the Willow Creek Parkway at Parks Highway Mile 71.3. Susitna Landing is located at Parks Highway Mile 82.5. There is also bank fishing and handicapped access. Talkeetna Landing is close to downtown Talkeetna, near the confluence of the Talkeetna, Chulitna, and Susitna rivers. The launch was initially developed by the community of Talkeetna for public use, and has been upgraded with Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funds.

The Parks Highway Mile 104 "boat launch" is basically an un-maintained gravel bar with a road approach. The access road starts from the small state campground on the southeast side of the bridge, then continues through private land to the river. It can be extremely hazardous at high water levels.

Road-Accessible Fishing: Parks Highway Roadside Streams

Willow Creek (Parks Hwy. Mile 71.3) offers easy shore access at the state-operated campground at the mouth. There are also several privately-operated campgrounds upstream near the Parks Highway bridge.

Willow Creek has been enhanced with chinook salmon smolt since 1985. Although you'll find eager king salmon anglers as early as the first week of June, the best time to fish Willow Creek is mid-June through the season closure. Many anglers fish the mouth, but keep in mind that kings can also be found throughout the lower river upstream to the Parks Highway bridge. Most of the harvested kings are 3- or 4-ocean fish, around 25 to 30 pounds, although a few 50- 60-pounders are caught every year. Willow Creek weir counts are posted on line at

www.state.ak.us/adfg. Click to the Southcentral Region, then on Fish Weir/Sonar Counts.

The **Kashwitna River** crosses the Parks Highway at Mile 83.1. This is a glacial system, and it gets even cloudier in early and mid-summer, creating less than optimal fishing conditions during peak return times. Still, lucky anglers may find one or two fish at the mouth during late June.

Susitna Landing, Parks Highway Mile 82.4, offers a boat launch and camping facilities with excellent handicapped access right at the mouth of the Kashwitna River. Many fishing guides and charters also use Susitna Landing as their launch site.

The mouth of **Sheep Creek** is reached by driving west on Resolute Avenue (Parks Hwy. Mile 86.3). At the mouth of the creek is a seasonally-maintained camping area with public rest rooms. A short trail from the parking area leads to the confluence of Sheep Creek and the Susitna River. King salmon can arrive as early as mid-June, but fishing improves until the season closure.

There is a small un-maintained fishing area on the downstream side of the Parks Highway bridge (Mile 88.4), on the north bank of the creek. Kings generally reach this upstream location by the first week of July.

Montana Creek at Mile 96.5 of the Parks Highway is a popular king salmon fishing destination. King salmon provide good action here by late June through the season closure. Camping and RV parking is available in privately-operated campgrounds at the highway crossing.

Access to the mouth of **Rabideux Creek** is just north of where the Parks Highway crosses the Susitna River at Mile 105. When the Susitna River is running high, water often floods the road to Rabideux Creek. When this happens, an alternative route from a turnout at Mile 105.4 on the Parks Highway may be usable. The last week of June until the close of king salmon season offers anglers the best shot of hooking a chinook.

A gravel road at Parks Highway Mile 102.5 offers access to the mouth of **Sunshine Creek**. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough maintains a parking area near the mouth of the creek. Kings typically arrive here by late June, and anglers fish here until the close of king season.

Birch Creek crosses the Talkeetna Spur Road near Mile

9, and there is good king fishing at the mouth during late June until the season closure.

Boat-Accessible Eastside Susitna River Streams

Little Willow Creek (Parks Hwy. Mile 74.8) is accessible at the Parks Highway bridge, but you'll need a boat to get to its confluence with the Susitna River where the best fishing takes place. There are no facilities at Little Willow Creek, and the property along that stream is privately owned. The best fishing takes place at the mouth from mid-June to late June.

Grey's Creek crosses the Parks Highway at Mile 81.8. The shoreline is private property, and there is no legal public shoreline access to the mouth from the Parks Highway bridge. Access to the mouth is boat only, by launching at one of the above-described facilities. The best fishing at the mouth is from mid- to late June.

The mouth of **Caswell Creek** produces wild king salmon from mid-June through the season closure. A large gravel turnout at Mile 84 begins the 1/2 -mile gravel access road to the mouth and a primitive campground with limited public rest rooms and trash service.

The land around the mouth of **Goose Creek** is privately owned, and access is by boat only. Kings usually arrive here by late June and fishing is good until the season closes in July.

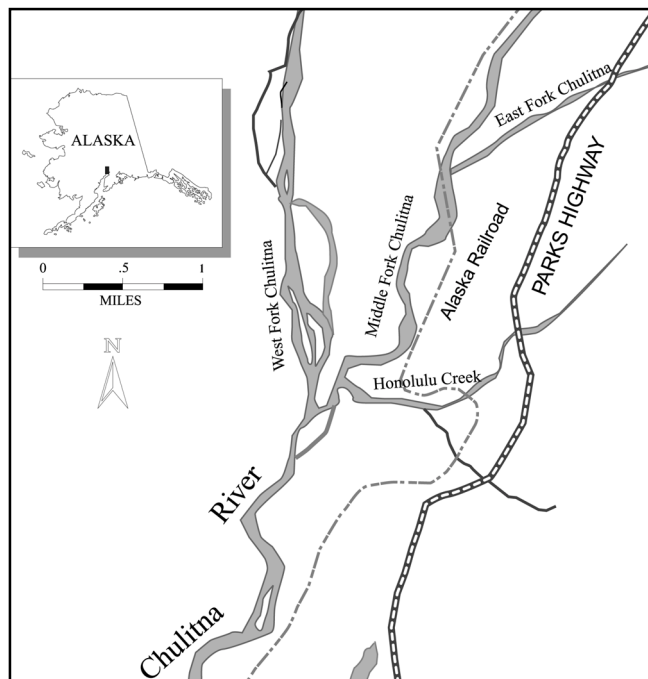
Upriver on the "Big Su"

The mainstem Susitna River between Talkeetna and Devil's Canyon

Roughly 54 miles of Susitna River separates Talkeetna from the dangerous waters of Devil's Canyon. These 54 miles offers the skilled river boater some exciting water and great fishing.

There are many stories of the famous and deadly waters of Devil's Canyon. Few have taken the trip up the Susitna River to the canyon's outlet. This reach of river requires a moderately powerful jet boat and the experience to operate in 10-mile-per-hour currents and three- to five-foot waves. These qualifiers will allow you to access the mouths of Portage Creek and Indian River. It is not advised that anglers travel beyond Portage Creek.

King salmon will arrive in this part of the Big Su around June 15 – 20. The peak fishing is usually early July through the season closure.



Chulitna River/Honolulu Creek area

The Chulitna River area

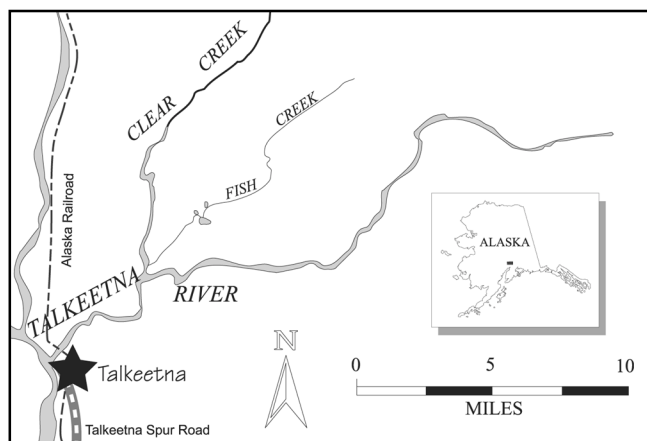
The East and Middle forks of the Chulitna River, as well as Honolulu Creek, can be accessed from several points along the Parks Highway. Both forks offer excellent wilderness rafting and king salmon fishing. The final few days of the king salmon season are generally the most productive in this area.

The Talkeetna River area

Clear Creek is by far the most popular king salmon stream in the Talkeetna River area. Don't look for much action before June 20. Once the fishing does pick up, it gets good and stays that way through season closure. In fact, nearly half of the seasonal harvest usually occurs after July 4.

A boat is an absolute necessity to fish the Talkeetna, so either bring your own or charter one. Don't believe anyone who tries to tell you it's a nice walk up to Clear Creek!

In addition to Clear Creek, try any of the areas where clear or iron-colored water mixes with the glacial waters of the Talkeetna. King salmon hold in these confluence



Talkeetna River/Clear Creek area

areas before continuing their journey upstream, and when present, seem particularly anxious to take a lure.

Westside Susitna River king salmon fishing

The Westside Susitna Area consists of all waters draining into the west side of the Susitna River downstream of the Deshka River to Cook Inlet.

This area includes the Deshka River, Alexander Creek, the Yentna River drainage including Indian Creek, Fish Lake Creek, Moose Creek, Lake Creek, the Kahiltna River drainage including Peters Creek, and the Skwentna River drainage including the Talachulitna River.

Access to westside fisheries — boat or plane only

If you plan to use your own boat to gain access to westside Susitna River king salmon, you can launch from one of the access sites described in the east side section, or launch at the Port of Anchorage, cross Northern Cook Inlet to the Susitna River, then head upstream.

CAUTION! Northern Cook Inlet has 30-foot tides and strong winds ... not a good place to begin a boating career! If, however, you are experienced, and have a properly-equipped 20-foot or better boat, or a saltwater-capable inflatable, crossing the inlet is an efficient way to reach the streams located in the lower Susitna River drainage.

Just remember to enter and exit the river's mouth during the hours of high tide. When reading the tide book make certain that you adjust for the difference in time

that high tide arrives at Anchorage and then at the mouth of the Susitna River.

Small plane access to west side Susitna River king salmon fisheries is quite good. However, even for the experienced pilot, tricycle gear is not recommended. There is only one developed and maintained airport in the area, located in the community of Skwentna (year-round population 20), the 2,500-foot-long runway is not monitored.

Once you land at Skwentna, you will find a roadhouse offering guide services, rooms, meals and a post office. To find king salmon from Skwentna you must have access to a boat.

Other than the Skwentna airport, unless you have a properly-equipped wheel plane and are familiar with gravel bar landings, a float plane is your best option. Float planes can access the mouths of most tributary streams, many of the lakes adjacent to the rivers, or the rivers themselves.

The best advice for pilots is to land only where you feel safe. Call an air charter operator in Anchorage's Lake Hood or Merrill Field and ask where they land. They may not give out any "secret spots," but in the interest of safety they will tell you where the traditional landing areas are.

Alexander Creek flows directly into the Susitna River 10 river miles upstream from Cook Inlet. Since Alexander Creek is so close to salt water, king salmon arrive early, with a few available by May 20. The action is usually fast at the mouth by the Memorial Day weekend, and peaks during the first week of June.

After June 10, the best king fishing is upstream from the confluence with the Susitna River. Alexander Creek is not a big stream, and it is usually boatable by a jet-equipped river boat as far upstream as Trail Creek, a distance of about 14 creek miles. King salmon will be present in this section by about June 5.

In the **Deshka River**, 20,000-40,000 king salmon run up this iron-colored stream, and many more leave the glacial waters of the Susitna River to rest at the mouth of the Deshka before heading further up the Susitna River to their spawning stream. In the past 10 years, anglers have harvested 4,000-10,000 king salmon per year from the Deshka River, and caught and released nearly twice that.

The **Yentna River** enters the Susitna River from the west, approximately 30 river miles upstream from Cook



The Deshka River weir. Weir counts are posted on the [ADF&G Sport Fish Southcentral Region website](#).

Inlet. This river system drains the high peaks of the Alaska Range from Mount McKinley to Rainy Pass.

Lake Creek is the number one producer of king salmon in the Yentna River drainage. The best fishing found between June 10-25.

The mouth of Lake Creek can be fished from shore or from a boat. Boat rental is available from the 15+ local lodges or air charter services, but it is advisable to make reservations ahead of time.

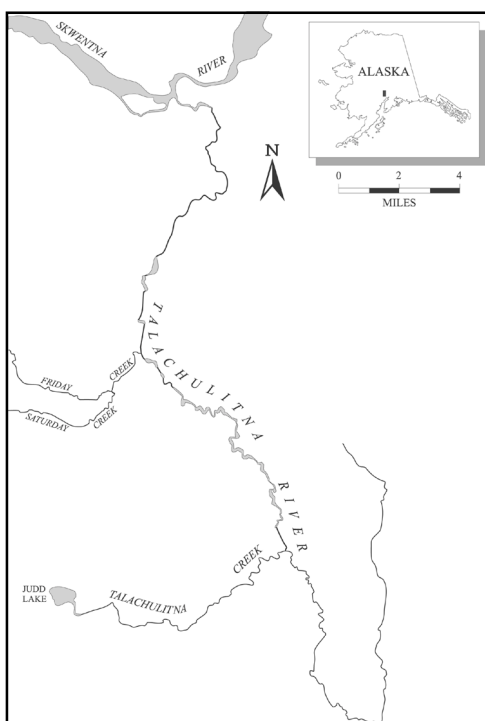
Hiking up Lake Creek is tough. Few people get very far, so boating is the preferred choice. Lake Creek is shallow, rocky, and fast, and there are braided channels and fallen trees. Only experienced boaters should attempt Lake Creek, with extreme caution, and only in a light, nimble jet boat, an 18-footer for example, with a 40- or 50-horsepower jet outboard. Even with this suggested rig, because of the current, sweepers, and rocks, boaters are limited to 3-5 miles of creek. Above 5 creek miles, Lake Creek becomes hazardous and very hard on your valuable equipment.

Lake Creek can also be an exciting float trip, but it is not recommended for beginners. There are stretches of Class III water, so don't overload your raft. Use at least a 12- or 13-foot self-bailing raft with a rowing frame, and tie down your gear. Start in Chelatna Lake and plan on at least four to five days to complete the trip. There are also private guides offering float trips.

Bulchitna Lake, about two miles upstream of Lake Creek's confluence with the Yentna River, offers an alternative to the fly-in angler who wants to hike to excellent

fishing. Lake Creek is especially fast in the Bulchitna area, so bring heavier gear, and load up with at least 25-pound line if you want to keep one of the 30- 40-pound king salmon.

In the **Skwentna area**, there are small streams supporting modest runs of king salmon, and fishing is best at the stream mouths and in those sloughs with clear, iron-colored water. Kings arrive in this area by June 12-15, with the best time during the last week of June, or on into July.



The Talachulitna River

The **Talachulitna River** is known for its quality rainbow trout and salmon fishing.

The “Tal,” about 15 river miles upstream of Skwentna, will have king salmon by June 15-20. The number of kings passing through the mouth peaks around June 25-30, with fish remaining in the area through the end of the season. King salmon are well-distributed in the Talachulitna River by July 1.

You can boat up from Skwentna, but be careful. The Skwentna River is a very fast, braided glacial river with many deadfalls and overhanging trees. The mouth of the Tal is not a large area. If water conditions are right only 4-

6 boats can fish the confluence without compromising each other. The fishing in this area can be excellent.

If you want to float the Talachulitna River for king salmon, wait until at least June 20. Few king salmon will be in the upper reaches by that time, but the rainbow trout and grayling fishing should be excellent. The Tal is a five-to seven-day float if you choose to do the entire river from Judd Lake to the Skwentna River confluence. The upper third is often shallow, and it is occasionally necessary to walk your raft and make short portages. During high water this section of the river can be very hazardous, as “sweepers” are abundant. Anglers have died as a result of rafts being pinned against, or forced under “sweepers.”

A spillway through a short canyon is located about halfway down the Tal from its confluence with Talachulitna Creek. It should provide you with some excitement, and unless you have an overloaded raft or the river is very high, you shouldn’t have any major problems.

Peters Creek flows into the glacial **Kahiltna River**, which in turn joins the Yentna River.

Access to the lower portion of Peters Creek is by float plane to Shulin Lake. Shulin Lake also has a wheel strip. Peters Creek is approximately three miles from Shulin Lake, along a well-established trail. King salmon arrive in Peters Creek around June 10, with the peak June 15-25. Fishing remains good into July.

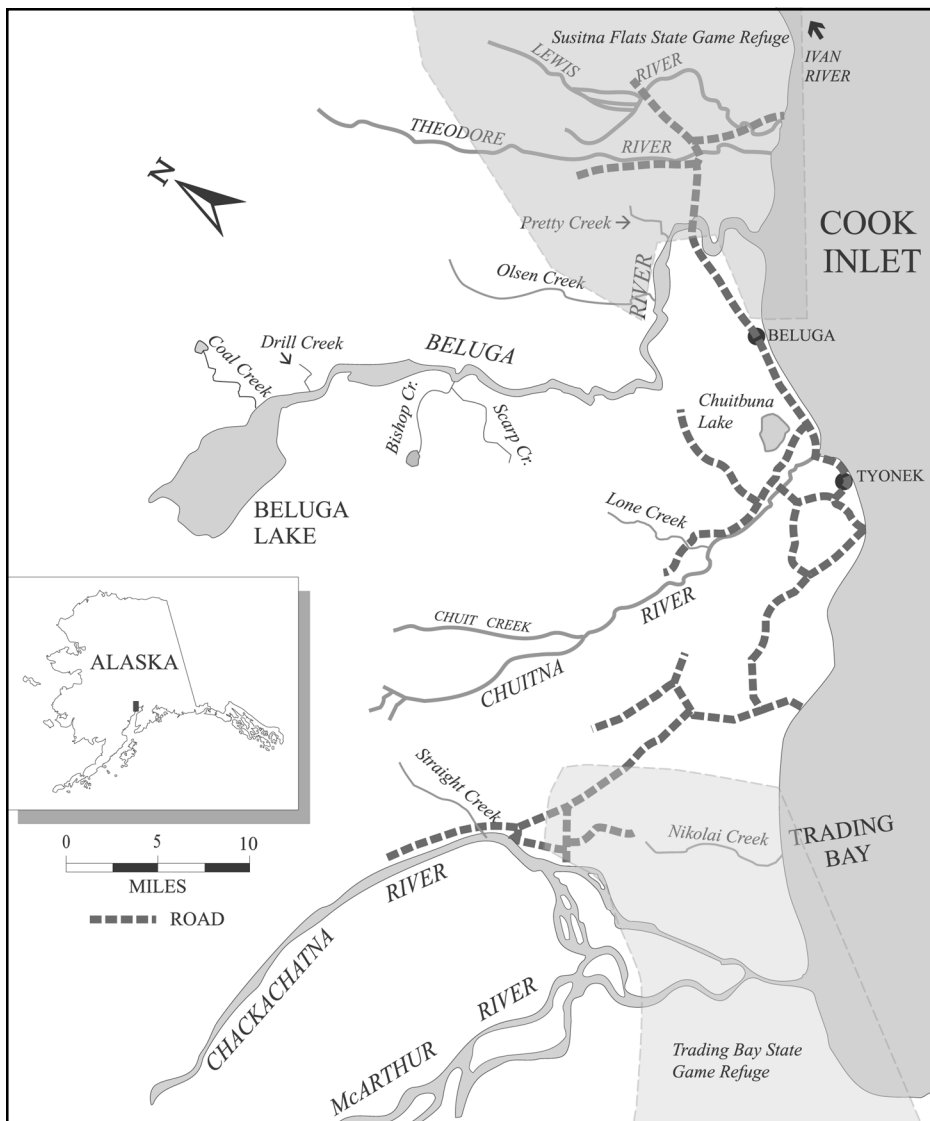
The West Cook Inlet Area

Beautiful, remote king fishing, only one hour from Anchorage? West Cook Inlet has it.

The West Cook Inlet Area consists of all waters north of the latitude of the southern tip of Chisik Island and the mouth of the Susitna River. The major producers in this area include the Theodore River, the Beluga River, the Chuitna (or Chuit) River, Nikolai Creek, and the clear water tributaries of the McArthur River.

King salmon begin to arrive in mid-May and continue into July. Arrival time at each individual stream can vary by as much as one week.

As with any remote fishery, public access and services are limited and specific knowledge of the local area is often the difference between success and explaining that you “had a good time anyway.”



The West Cook Inlet area

Access — boat or plane only

The West Cook Inlet area is not linked by road to the highway system of Southcentral Alaska. There are a number of Merrill Field air taxi operators that run regularly-scheduled flights to the area. Once you have arrived in the area you will find a well-developed road system, and this is the key to reaching much of the available fishing.

The Chuitna, Lewis, Theodore, and Beluga rivers are the only streams open to king salmon fishing along this road network. Once servicing oil and gas exploration and the timber industry, these roads are now largely unused and un-maintained. Even though landing strips were also constructed, with a couple of exceptions, these landing areas are now privately owned and not available to the angling public.

Once on the ground you may still have to hire transportation, but the cost of a shuttle to the fishing holes is usually reasonable. Wheel plane access to a few of the streams is quite good, using the old road as a runway.

The oil and gas industry is still very active in the Beluga area, so be careful to avoid their work sites and watch out for equipment on the roads.

If you plan to use a boat to gain access, you are faced with a number of significant logistical challenges. Realistically, boats are not practical in this area. The first challenge you face is crossing northern Cook Inlet with its 30-foot tides and frequent high winds. In addition, because of boulders, snags, shoals, and extremely fast currents, none of the West Cook Inlet streams (with the exception of the Chakachatna-McArthur and Beluga River systems) are boatable above their intertidal zones. If you get into either the

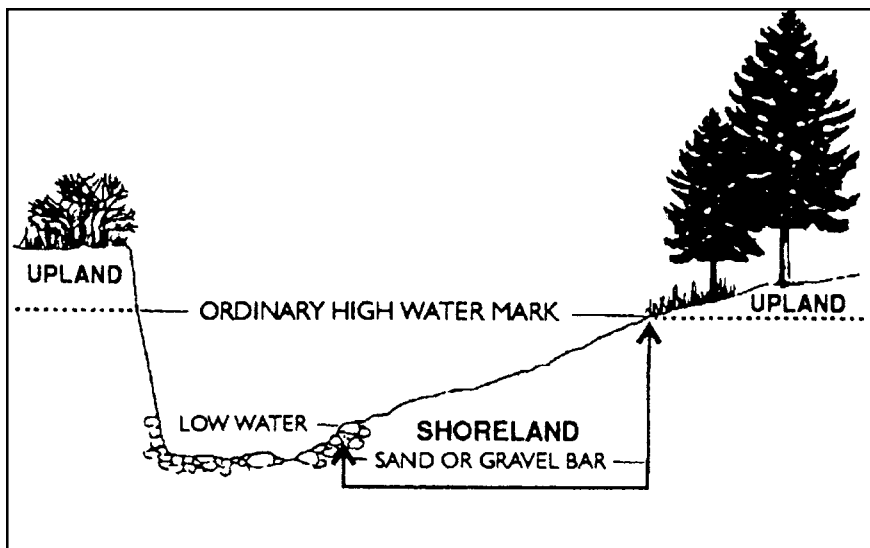
Chakachatna-McArthur or Beluga Rivers, you won't go very far without a jet drive.

The Beluga, Lewis, and Theodore all wander through part of the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge, over 300,000 acres of prime waterfowl, moose, coyote, wolf, and bear habitat. The lower reaches of the Chakachatna-McArthur rivers flow through the Trading Bay State Game Refuge.

Access to the refuges is managed by ADF&G for the protection of fish and wildlife, their habitats, and public use of the area. Uses of state refuge lands are controlled to prevent habitat changes which would be harmful to the wildlife or habitat.

King salmon fishing in West Cook Inlet streams

The **Ivan River** is actually more of a large tidal gut than a river, but a deep tidal channel offers a place for



The “ordinary high water mark.” Under state law, the public has the right to use the entire water column of the Chuit River below the ordinary high water mark, regardless of the ownership of the riverbed. However, the right to use the shoreline does not include a right to enter, cross, or use private uplands

kings to hold during late May and the first two weeks of June. Only a few fish travel above the intertidal zone. This deep channel is one of the spots where a boat would come in handy. Wheel plane access is possible by landing on the adjacent road and walking over to the river, or if the plane has large tires, by landing directly on the flats when permitted by the refuge..

The **Lewis River** flows out of the high country between Mt. Susitna and Little Mt. Susitna. The **Theodore River** is next down the coast, flowing out of the high country between Little Mount Susitna and Beluga Mountain. Look for kings at the mouths of these streams by the first week of June through the end of June.

The **Beluga River-Beluga Lake** system is a large, glacially turbid drainage carrying a heavy silt load down from the peaks of the Alaska Range. King salmon enter the Beluga River in late May, bound for numerous small clear water tributaries as well as Coal Creek, which flows into Beluga Lake. Beluga River is named after the small white whales that often feed on salmon in and near the mouth of the river in May and June.

To fish the Beluga River for kings the angler should concentrate on the confluences of the small tributaries. Pretty Creek is a backwater slough entering from the north. If the water is high enough, float planes can land in the

Beluga River and taxi into the mouth of Pretty Creek.

Float planes also land in the Beluga River near the mouth of Olsen Creek, but the river there is much faster and more unpredictable. In addition, Super Cub-type wheel planes land on the gravel bar adjacent to the mouth of Olsen Creek. River boats can easily run the Beluga River as far up as Olsen Creek, but if the river is low, as it often is in June, a jet would be helpful.

Look for kings at the mouths of these streams by the first week of June through the end of June. The peak of the king run in the lower Beluga river should occur June 10-15.

The Beluga River turns into a Class III monster just above Olsen Creek, making the confluence of Bishop and Scarp Creeks difficult to get to. The holding area at this confluence is small, and kings do not hold for long before moving up; in fact, few fish ever enter Bishop or Scarp Creeks to spawn.

Beluga and the Lower Beluga lakes lie at the head of the Beluga River, with Lower Beluga Lake probably more of a wide spot in the river than a lake. A series of small streams, accessible to float plane, flow into the lakes from the north. Each provides some holding area for migrating kings. Drill Creek supports a modest spawning population. Look for kings in this area after June 15. Coal Creek, flowing into Beluga Lake, is the largest producer of kings in the drainage. Look for kings here after June 20. A good camping area exists at the mouth of Coal Creek, while Coal Creek itself offers some good fishing for hearty souls willing to hike in from Coal Lake.

The **Chuitna** or **Chuit River**, emptying into Cook Inlet just north of the village of Tyonek, supports a moderate run of king salmon.

The Chuit is a much larger stream than the Theodore or Lewis rivers, and is an exciting river to fish, offering many long, fast runs and deep pools. King salmon arrive at the mouth of the Chuit in mid- to late May, but muddy

water from spring runoff usually makes the river difficult to fish before the second week of June. It is usually safe to say that if the water is clear, the kings are already in the river.

During the first week of the fishery, anglers have the most success near the mouth. The first deep hole is a real producer right after the high tide. By June 10, king salmon are distributed throughout the lower ten miles of river, and are still coming into the mouth.

Access to the river is quite limited. The land ownership along the lower 9 miles varies, and there are only a few points of public access. The uplands on both sides of the river are owned by the Tyonek Native Corporation (TNC), except for a few parcels and the lands in section 30, T.12 N., R.10 W., which are owned by either the Kenai Peninsula Borough (KPB) or by private parties.

In addition, since the Bureau of Land Management conveyed the southern half of the lower 9 miles of the Chuit to TNC (along with the uplands to the south), TNC views any public use of the southern shore as trespass. However, the public may stand and walk on the northern

shore, from mid-channel up to the ordinary high water mark.

The “ordinary high water mark” is defined by the vegetation line along the bank, or by erosion, shelving, or changes in the soil caused by the river water. The ordinary high water mark usually includes sandbars and islands.

Other than the following access sites listed below, there are no other public easements to the Chuit across the private uplands.

- River mouth access: you may boat or walk up the river from its mouth at Cook Inlet.
- Pan Am Road access: you may enter the Pan Am Road through a public easement on Chuitbuna Lake. The public may not use the old road that runs south from the Pan Am Road to the river about 1 mile west of Chuitbuna Lake. This road is private property.
- At Mile 1.2 of the Pan Am Road there is section line access through Kenai Peninsula Borough property (see below).



Plan on releasing your fish? Here's a fish-friendly way to get a photo of your great catch.

Catch and Release

Snagging or trying to snag a fish is illegal in all fresh waters of Alaska. Also, in some Alaskan fisheries, if you plan to release a fish, **you may not remove it from the water, even to take a photo.** In these fisheries, once you remove a fish from the water, it's counted as your harvest. **Check the regulations carefully before going fishing.**

At one time or another, almost everyone accidentally foul-hooks or “snags” a fish. The fish must be released immediately, and if released correctly, will suffer little permanent injury and will spawn successfully. Here are some suggestions that minimize harm to fish:

1. Land the fish as quickly as possible. Playing the fish to complete exhaustion takes away the energy it needs for spawning. Do not remove the fish from the water
2. Never place your hands under the fish's gill covers. This injures fragile gill arches and causes almost certain death.
3. Gently grasp the fish around its body to remove the hook. A long-nosed pliers is excellent for this task. Don't wet your hands: it makes the fish more difficult to handle.
4. If the hook cannot be easily removed, cut the line as close as possible to the fly, and leave it in the fish. Do this if it appears that removing the hook will cause more damage than leaving it in.
5. Immediately return the fish to the water and point it upstream. Gently cradle it in this position until it swims on its own.

- At Mile 7 of the Pan Am Road you will find a trail easement and a 1/2-acre site easement for public access to the river.
- At Lone Creek, Mile 9 of the Pan Am Road, you can put in rafts or canoes from the 100-foot road easement and float down the creek to the Chuit's mouth.
- The Pan Am Road in Section 20 crosses private property, and is closed to the public. Permission from TNC and the other private property owners is necessary before following this road to Lone Creek. The state has an alternate easement to build a road around this private property, but no road has yet been built.
- Beluga Road access: a portion of the Beluga Road crosses private property just north of its intersection with the Pan Am Road. This portion is not a public right-of-way, and permission of the land owner is necessary.
- Section line access: in Section 30 there is public access to the north side of the Chuit through Kenai Peninsula Borough property. There is also a 50-foot section line easement on the east side of the western line of Sections 19 and 30, along Kenai Peninsula Borough property, which can be reached through Pan Am Road Mile 1.2. This easement meets the Chuit about 1/2-mile upstream of Cook Inlet. A natural gas pipeline is buried in a portion of this easement.

Local guide services are available, and vary from basic air taxi service to fully equipped lodges. Services and operators vary from year to year; the best advice is to contact one of the Merrill Field air taxis flying to the Tyonek-Beluga River area for current information.

The mouth of Lone Creek, about six miles upstream from the mouth of the Chuit, is a hotspot for most of the season. The adventuresome hiker or the lucky angler with a helicopter will find the Lone Creek confluence to be

some of the best all-around fishing waters in Cook Inlet.

There is some private land on the north side of the Chuit in the Lone Creek area, including a stretch of the old road.

Nikolai Creek flows along the base of a long ridge extending west out of the Alaska Range, and empties into Trading Bay just south of Granite Point. Small and iron-colored, Nikolai Creek produces a weak run of king salmon, and is inferior to the many other streams when planning a trip for kings. There is road access from the Granite Point airstrip.

The **Chakachatna-McArthur rivers** are massive drainages flowing from the glacial peaks of the Alaska Range and from Chakachamna Lake down through many channels into Trading Bay and Cook Inlet. The clear water tributaries and confluence areas support the fishery, rather than the unproductive glacial waters themselves. On the Chakachatna River, the clearwater tributary of Straight Creek is the one to hit. Kings are usually at its confluence with the Chakachatna from mid-June through the season's end. A nearby old road bed provides a marginal landing area.

The McArthur River has a few more possibilities, but they are difficult to access. The three clearwater streams draining the flats between the Chakachatna and McArthur rivers all have kings, but the largest one, closest to the mountains, is the best bet. These streams are not named on any map, but they are easy to find if you fly overhead. Access, however, to any of them is poor whether by boat or air unless you have a helicopter. One last stream lies further up the McArthur River on the north side. This one is also unnamed, but you will recognize it from the large triangular sand bar at its confluence with the McArthur River. Kings will be in these areas by mid-June.



For information about camping, accommodations, fishing guides, and other visitor services, contact the Alaska Division of Tourism at P.O. Box 110809, Juneau, Alaska 99811 (907) 465-2012 Fax (907) 465-3767 www.dced.state.ak.us/tourism/



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